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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 KINSHASA 000823

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [KDEM](#) [CG](#)  
SUBJECT: MLC: ISOLATING BEMBA

Classified By: PolCouns MSanderson, reasons 1.4 b/d.

1. (1) PolCouns met May 17 and 18 with Movement for Congolese Liberation (MLC) members Olivier Kamitatu and Thomas Luhaka to discuss internal MLC politics and election strategy. (Note: Kamitatu is the President of the National Assembly and Luhaka both the Secretary General of the MLC and the party's leader in the Assembly. Kamitatu is viewed as the most likely alternative to Bemba in the event that the party should decide to change leaders. End Note.) Both men privately deplored the inevitability of Jean Pierre Bemba's being the MLC candidate for President, although Kamitatu noted that the silver lining could be that Bemba would wind up without a position in the future government as long as the electoral law specifies that each individual may only run for one position in each election, i.e., Bemba must choose before the campaign begins whether to be a presidential or parliamentary candidate rather than having the option to pursue both. Luhaka said that the recent constitutional debate highlighted the dissatisfaction of the party rank-and-file with Bemba, whose grasping and dictatorial nature is increasingly isolating him. For instance, Luhaka said that during debate on presidential term limits Bemba called him and Kamitatu to insist that the party had to change its agreed position, a decision which ran completely counter to the desires of the parliamentarians. Faced with the difficult choice of voting against his own conscience -- and forcing others to do so -- or disobeying a direct order from Bemba, Luhaka punted by asking Kamitatu's permission to leave the plenary hall, effectively allowing each MLC member to vote as he or she saw fit.

2. (C) Looking toward elections, Kamitatu said that Bemba's current inclination is to run a campaign based on his being the sole "pure" Congolese presidential candidate (a reference to President Kabila's supposedly mixed Tutsi background and VP Ruberwa's Tutsi lineage, and perhaps also a slam at Kamitatu's mixed race background as well). Such a campaign would be hateful and divisive, Kamitatu acknowledged, but said that Bemba really has very little else to run on. When PolCouns suggested that the MLC is best positioned to run on a platform of economic issues, particularly appealing to businessmen, Kamitatu smiled and retorted that businessmen won't win the election and Bemba doesn't know how to appeal to ordinary people. He added that he personally doesn't believe that Bemba will win the presidency, and therefore he already is working on trying to field the strongest possible slate of parliamentary candidates to ensure an MLC majority in the future parliament, or at least position them to be part of a future majority coalition.

3. (C) PolCouns asked Kamitatu directly why he did not either attempt to run for president as an MLC candidate (effectively supplanting Bemba) or resign from the party and run separately. Kamitatu replied that he felt he had a responsibility to the memory of those who had died in the MLC cause during the war, and to those who still believe that the party should stand for something. He admitted that he very easily could leave the MLC, as he already is being courted by both the PPRD and RCD as well as "independent elements," but said that he would prefer to try to reform the party and realize its potential. Luhaka later told PolCouns that, while all of this is true, Kamitatu also is afraid of Bemba, who has more than once hinted at a violent reaction against Kamitatu's family should Kamitatu try either to upstage him and/or leave the party. Luhaka himself has considered leaving the MLC in favor of the PPRD, where his friend Antoine Ghonda would guarantee him entry, but has decided, like his friend and mentor Kamitatu, to stay where he is at least through the elections.

4. (C) Both Kamitatu and Luhaka are quietly using their influence as senior party leaders to try to distance Bemba from the party, and separate his image from that of the MLC in the public mind. They hope that by doing so they will be able to limit the damage inflicted on the MLC by Bemba's personal unpopularity.

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4. (C) This quiet intraparty revolt is typical of the personal styles of both Kamitatu and Luhaka. Both prefer circumlocution to confrontation and, particularly when dealing with Bemba, avoidance probably is the wisest course. That said, Bemba is not unaware of their actions. While

apparently not retaliating against Kamitatu so far (whose family's political connections make him far more valuable to Bemba than Luhaka), Bemba is beginning to orchestrate a campaign designed to force Luhaka to resign. For instance, while not officially removing Luhaka as the Secretary General of the party, Bemba has instructed a different man to "act" as Luhaka's shadow, and has authorized him to sign documents, etc. With months yet to go before official electoral campaigning gets underway, there is ample opportunity for the MLC to implode, or for its internal weaknesses to be publicly exploited by other parties.

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